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De ongeschoolde arbeider. Een sociologische analyse.

Haveman, Jan

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SUMMARY

This report is the result of an enquiry into the attitudes and social behaviour of the unskilled worker. The enquiry was carried out in a number of Netherlands towns and rural areas, and consisted mainly of the interviewing of unskilled workers, of their wives, and of persons who, by virtue of their occupation, have a task to perform in the unskilled workers' milieu: foremen, social workers, teachers, civil servants, union officials, youth-leaders, ministers of religion, etc. In part I of this study a description is given of the life of unskilled workers based on these interviews and on the results of personal observation. Empirical enquiry confirmed the hypothesis which initiated it, viz. that "the unskilled workers form the nucleus of a social class in which many give evidence, by behaviour which is not in accordance with the bourgeois group-norms, of the fact that they either are not aware of, or do not acknowledge, the traditional social norms in the Netherlands".

Social control of the bourgeois milieu has a disciplinary effect on the social life of skilled workers, but does not reach the milieu of unskilled workers. In their relations towards family, labour and the neighbourhood and in their attitudes towards institutions such as churches, schools, political parties, labour unions, etc., they show ideas, opinions, beliefs and sentiments which differ in fundamental points from what is regarded in other social classes as "normal".

In the milieu of the bourgeoisie, into which the skilled workers fit and the unskilled do not, the social order is known as a rank-order, the positions in which are determined by formal and objective criteria: wealth, specific skill, position in the hierarchy of organizations, etc. The unskilled worker is not trained, he has no titles or diplomas and no wealth, and therefore he has no social power, that is to say, he is not able to compete in the bourgeois milieu in maintaining a status and playing a social rôle. The consequence is that behaviour, which in the other social classes symbolises the level of stratification, means nothing to him. He knows neither social competition nor the norms which accompany it: the rules for ascending normally from one social stratum to another. The significance of the school in this respect lies quite outside his field of vision. The life of the unskilled worker is controlled by the primary norms of his "face to face" groups: his work-group, his neighbourhood, his family. It is not at school, where the children are prepared for social competition, but in street-gangs, that the

socialization process takes place most workers' milieu. Here the young learn which are to determine their behaviour their lives. As Allison Davis rightly says the higher skilled working class and of to their culture, to their system of social do the under-privileged workers act in. The habits of "shiftlessness", "irresponsibility", absenteeism, and quitting the job, regarded as a result of the "innate" personality of workers, are in fact *normal responses* from his physical and social environment a system of behaviour and attitudes which in *that environment* in which the individual and in which he has been trained." (1946)

The nonconformity of the unskilled worker is a psychological, but a sociological problem, conditioned, at least if one understands behaviour, conditioned emotional responses ideas, which members of a social group learn by instruction or imitation" (LINTON, 1936). The social behaviour of unskilled workers is determined by their family, their work-group, their gang, their unit as against the pattern of bourgeois behaviour. In short, of a primary and a secondary culture.

The primary and secondary culture, the "Primaries" and "Secondaries" (MERTON, 1936) in many respects an antithesis. On the one hand, the cultures contact between the groups is high emotional tension. This borderland is the middle of the so-called working class, between the unskilled workers, between the slums and the districts, between the gangs of the "street" and the school, between the unskilled work-group and the many sects and the churches, and other political parties.

Naturally this state of affairs is a source of tension, which, though generally latent, must be serious (BOUMAN, 1946). In order to forestall social tensions it is important to realise that the life of unskilled workers is a product of their environment in the Netherlands, in the same way as is the life of the other groups. Every social behaviour here has a practical functional meaning for social life, at the same time a symbol of prestige in the

Naturally this state of affairs is a source of many social tensions which, though generally latent, must nevertheless be regarded as serious (BOUMAN, 1946). In order to form a right judgment of these social tensions it is important to realise that the nonconformity of unskilled workers is a product of the social structure of the Netherlands, in the same way as is the conformity of the bourgeois groups. Every social behaviour here has not only a rational and practical functional meaning for social life as a whole, but is at the same time a symbol of prestige in the structure of social classes.

This makes social adjustment impossible for unskilled workers, since they are without any status. So their own primary culture-values are substituted for the secondary bourgeois-culture. This substitution is inevitable and the non-conformity of the unskilled workers can therefore be called: "a normal reaction of normal people to abnormal conditions" (MERTON, 1949).

A solution to the social problems connected with the non-conformity of unskilled workers will therefore only be found in a change in the conditions which determine their behaviour. This would involve a change in the bourgeois culture of the Netherlands. Such a change might be brought about, for our culture is a dynamic one. Not until primary group-norms in the form of "Gemeinschafts"-values (Tönnies) attain a more autonomous significance than they have at present, and in this way dethrone the absolutism of the formal organization of our social life and its stratification, will the unskilled worker feel at home in our society.

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